

The University of Chicago

PIONEER MARKETING ASSOCIATIONS
OF THE AMERICAN BOOK
TRADE, 1873-1901

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

1938

By

JOE L. NORRIS

Private Edition, Distributed by
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With the close of the Civil War a new America came into being. Industrial capitalism, under the impetus given by the war, now swept forward, and under its leadership there developed a new order which changed much of the traditional American philosophy of what life should mean to all.¹ More and more machines displaced hand labor. Improved transportation and communication knit the nation into a more compact union. The great stretches of fertile plains and the undeveloped subterranean wealth of the West offered unlimited opportunity for exploitation. Cities grew with astounding rapidity and their problems made more complex the pattern of society. The increase of wealth was so enormous that it seemed almost measureless. It was a bonanza age in which bigness was synonymous with success.

The impact of these forces was felt in all phases of life. Their newness led to a variety of changes, experiments designed to bring about order. In all this, the book trade was no exception, for it too felt the full force of these changed conditions.

The generation which began to take an active part in the management of affairs about this time was the first real product of the comparatively new public school system and there rapidly developed a great reading public which the book trade was unprepared to serve profitably. The distributing machinery was antiquated and impractical. The old fashioned bookstore, dimly

¹In the words of Parrington "democracy passed under the custodianship of the middle class, who were busily engaged in creating a plutocracy. . . . The idea of a beneficent progress, which was the flower of the doctrine of human perfectibility, came to be interpreted as material expansion with constantly augmenting profits; and the idea of democracy came to be interpreted as the right to use the government of the whole for the benefit of the few." Vernon Louis Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America: 1860-1920 (Main Currents in American Thought, vol. III. New York, 1930), pp. xxiv-xxv.

lighted, with dusty shelves and dark corners, was still the main retailer of books in 1873.² Each year the business of buying and selling books became less remunerative, however, and there were fewer inducements for the investment of capital in such business except in the large cities. Even here there was general complaint that "a fair assortment of books" yielded inadequate returns "for money and labor invested," and in the small towns the bookseller steadily devoted increased attention to "fancy goods" to the neglect of literature.³

The decline was brought about in part by a lack of understanding and co-operation between publishers, jobbers and retailers. In a large measure the trouble lay in the system of discounts which was in turn responsible for unfair methods of competition and fictitious prices. The discount to the dealer was not uniform and ranged as high as forty to fifty per cent. At trade sales a sixty per cent reduction was often reached. It was even charged that books had been "slaughtered" for as much as ninety per cent below the published price.⁴ This, of course, was conducive to underselling on the part of large buyers who cut prices to such an extent that the small bookseller could not hope to compete and make enough to pay overhead, and yet he was compelled to sell at the price established by the undersellers.

Another harmful feature was the allowing of discounts to the general public. Those offered by publishers to the individual purchaser ranged from twenty to as high as forty per cent which was the same as given to the booksellers.⁵ The buyer, now educated

²Reminiscences of the old fashioned bookseller are numerous in the files of The Publishers' Weekly and several books on early retailers have been written. See for example: The Publishers' Weekly, IX (March 11, 1876), passim; William Brotherhead, Forty Years Among Old Booksellers of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1891); J. C. Derby, Fifty Years Among Authors, Books and Publishers (New York, 1884); Henry Curwen, History of Booksellers (London, 1873); New York Evening Post, 1874-75, passim.

³The Nation, XIX (September 10, 1874), 168. See also Publishers' and Stationers' Weekly Trade Circular, II (August 1, 1872), 113; The Publishers' Weekly, III (June 21, 1873), 598; IV (October 18, 1873), 398, 399 for similar complaints that it was necessary to stock bookstores with stationery, "gim-cracks," wall paper, and "Knick-knacks" in order to make them pay.

⁴Publishers' and Stationers' Weekly Trade Circular, II (August 1, 1872), 113. This situation was true not only in the United States but similar complaints came from England and Italy.

⁵The Publishers' Weekly, IV (August 2, 16, 23, October 4,

"in the idea that whenever he wanted to buy a book anywhere he might reasonably insist" upon a discount, demanded similar privileges from the retailer. If the local bookseller was unwilling to grant one, the customer turned to the publisher who was "ready to break down his prices, and damage the interest of the whole trade, rather than lose the paltry profits of an insignificant sale."⁶

Although some of the publishers deplored these evils and hoped they could be ended, they felt it was not their fault.⁷ People would not send to the publisher if they could get what they wanted from the local bookstore.⁸ That they did buy through the mail was due to the "indifference and want of enterprise on the part of the dealer" who did not keep informed in regard to new publications.⁹ According to the publisher it was the duty of the retailer to decide, from a perusal of reviews, what the citizens of his community wanted, and even should read. Well directed and planned activity and a realization that bookselling was "a profession and not a trade," would bring to him, therefore, the orders which were usually sent elsewhere.¹⁰

In short, the dispute between publisher and bookseller was that each claimed as a cause what the other considered the effect.¹¹ The evils of the discount system grew apace until by the early 'seventies it had "sapped the blood and marrow" of the trade, and stationery had become "the staple article of book-stores" and the "purser of the sinking ship."¹² It was generally

1873), 141-42, 176, 191-92, 344, 345.

⁶Ibid., III (January 9, 1873), 23, 24.

⁷Ibid., IV (August 23, 1873), 191, 192.

⁸Some of the reasons given why people did not prefer to purchase by mail were: risk of loss of money or book in the mail; delay and trouble of writing a letter; inability to examine the book and style of binding; danger of damage in the mail. Ibid., III (April 12, 1873), 375.

⁹Ibid. ¹⁰Ibid., V (February 7, 1874), 138.

¹¹Publishers' and Stationers' Weekly Trade Circular, II (August 1, 1872), 113.

¹²The Publishers' Weekly, III (June 21, 1873), 598. A bookseller at Riverhead, Long Island wrote: "One third of my capital is at present invested in paper hangings and shades, and not above one quarter in books. I advertise heavily, and solicit

realized that if the selling of books was "not to descend into deeper depths of unprofitable huckstering" and both publisher and bookseller "be something more than a mere shopman, or an old-clothes-man" the practice of selling at a discount to everyone would have to end.¹³

The reform most advocated for abolishing the discount evil was the reduction of retail prices.¹⁴ These should be based upon the amount paid the author, the actual cost of manufacture, and a fair profit to the publisher. Once the price was established, the discount to the dealer should not be over twenty-five per cent and that to jobbers and large buyers "should be so small that they could not afford to undersell." The discount rates should be rigorously maintained and none allowed to the general public.¹⁵

The vocal element of the book trade was united in the belief that the best method to achieve the needed reform was through a convention where the problems could be "thoroughly ventilated" and some sort of a formal organization be set up to enforce the rulings arrived at. Suggestions and requests for a booksellers' convention were made early in 1873 and continued regularly through the spring, summer and into the autumn.¹⁶

The situation was brought to a head by the panic of 1873. At first it was believed that the mercantile interests would be

trade from the whole country but it is of little use and don't [sic] pay As soon as I can compete with publishers in furnishing schools and libraries as well as the retail trade, I shall immediately double or treble my stock. As it is I am sorely tempted, and have considered the matter of keeping as few books as possible, and make more by selling other goods." Ibid., IV (October 18, 1873), 399.

¹³Ibid., III (January 9, 1873), 23.

¹⁴A dealer in Alabama, in line with the popular co-operative movement of the day, suggested that if each of the five thousand booksellers in the nation would subscribe \$40, a co-operative publishing company could be started. This would assure the retailers of fair dealing and obviate the necessity of bowing to the wishes of the already established publishing houses. Ibid., IV (October 18, 1873), 399.

¹⁵Publishers' and Stationers' Weekly Trade Circular, II (August 8, 1872), 131.

¹⁶The Publishers' Weekly, III (February 6, March 1, 22, 1873), 131, 218, 279, 280; IV (July 26, August 16, September 6, October 4, 18, 1873), 119, 171, 176, 235, 345, 398.

little affected, and on the whole the book trade of that year was not bad although the actual number of new books published was not as large as in former years.¹⁷ By the middle of October, however, it was admitted that the situation was more serious than had been at first anticipated. Collections were difficult to make and many publishers were having to postpone more new publications.¹⁸

The honor of actually calling a convention belonged to the western retailers who, suffering from the hard times, felt they could no longer exist under the circumstances and demanded something concrete in the way of reform. The nucleus of the movement was a group of "enterprising" booksellers of central Ohio who in the autumn of 1873 issued a call for a convention of western dealers to meet at Cincinnati on October 16th to effect a reform for the "mutual protection in trade."¹⁹ Although the editor of The Publishers' Weekly did not believe the attendance would be large since the meeting was called on short notice and during the busy season, he did think it was important as the initiatory measure of a movement that was destined to grow. It was, he said, the first step toward a general booksellers' convention.²⁰

Pursuant to call, the delegates assembled at Cincinnati on the date set. Among the most important grievances presented for consideration was that of discounts. Western wholesalers complained that after buying large stocks in the anticipation of supplying the western trade, they were forced to meet the unfair competition of eastern publishers who sold to the retailer at or near the same rates the jobbers received. Then, too, both eastern

¹⁷Ibid., IV (September 27, 1873), 319; V (January 10, 1874), 31. Philadelphia is the only city for which actual figures are available. Lippincott published about the same number of books as usual, but there were fewer juveniles. Claxton published about two-thirds as many, while the production of Porter and Coates was in excess of former years. Kay and Kay was about average. The Sunday School Union published about twenty per cent less and the Presbyterian Board of Publication for reasons besides business (reasons which were not stated) published hardly anything.

¹⁸Ibid., IV (October 4, 18, 1873), 333, 397-98.

¹⁹Ibid., IV (October 11, 1873), 376; The American Bookseller, I (January 15, 1876), 49.

²⁰The Publishers' Weekly, IV (October 11, 1873), 376.

and western wholesalers gave professional discounts which were "entirely too liberal and preposterous," and dealers of all classes habitually cut the price to the general public. A uniform trade discount was also necessary since some publishers gave regular dealers less discount than they did to "agents" who were in reality nothing more than "very small dealers."²¹

The committee on resolutions reported in favor of an organization to be known as the Booksellers' Protective Union which would secure uniformity in retail prices, reasonable but not exorbitant profits, and prevent discounting to persons not directly in the trade.²² A central executive committee was appointed to carry into effect these objects, and a letter setting forth the irregularities of the trade was sent to the publishers asking their co-operation in abolishing them.²³

Although the convention was composed largely of Ohioans, it was realized that successful reform was dependent upon the co-operation of the whole trade.²⁴ Accordingly, plans were made to meet again early the next year at Cincinnati, and in the meantime a general invitation was extended to booksellers to organize and send delegates.²⁵ In spite of appeals for wide-spread representation, however, most of the delegates who appeared in Cincinnati in February were from Ohio and the neighboring states. The register showed that twenty-six came from the former, four from New York, three from Indiana, and one each from Illinois, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Tennessee, and Kentucky.²⁶

²¹Ibid., IV (November 1, 1873), 485.

²²Ibid. The resolutions were unanimously adopted.

²³Ibid. This letter was circulated in the west and south, and by January, 1874 some eighty-two signatures from nine states had been obtained. The states represented and the number of signers were: Ohio, 44; Tennessee, 15; Indiana, 5; West Virginia, 5; Nebraska, 4; Missouri, 3; Michigan, 2; Kentucky, 2; and Iowa, 2. Ibid., V (January 3, 1874), 16.

²⁴Only about twenty-five firms had been represented at this first convention. The committees were composed wholly of Ohioans except for the one on the constitution and by-laws which had one member from Indianapolis. Ibid., IV (November 1, 1873), 486.

²⁵Ibid., IV (November 1, 15, 1873), 486, 531; V (January 3, 1874), 16.

²⁶Ibid., V (February 21, 1874), 179. There were undoubt-

The convention opened with a speech by Abel Low, president of the Booksellers' Protective Union, who stated that although the meeting was an experiment, it was necessary only "to act wisely, calmly, and not rashly" to make it a success. Its purpose was not to make a corner on books and raise prices or maintain high ones, but to show the public and the publishers that the dealers knew their business and were awake to its faults and needs. What was needed most of all, he said, was an organization which could settle amicably all disputes between publishers, jobbers, and retailers.²⁷

The chief work of the convention, therefore, centered around the organization of an association powerful enough to enforce reform. The result of the deliberations was the formation of the American Book Trade Union to supplant the Protective Union. According to the constitution the affairs of the new association were administered by four permanent committees.²⁸ The platform, which incorporated the declaration of principles presented by the committee on revision, stated that the purpose of the organization was "to unite the trade under a healthful and rational system of discounts" which would make it possible for "able and useful men" to remain in the business of bookselling and not "to stifle by combination the competition of enterprise and ability," which was the life of trade.²⁹ In order that the purpose of the Union be

edly a number of others present who failed to sign the register. The one Tennessean, however, arrived with credentials signed by eight houses in Nashville. Apparently this was the only officially accredited delegate present. Ibid., V (March 14, 1873), 272.

²⁷Ibid., V (February 21, 1874), 179-80.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 183-84. The committees were: executive; complaints and arbitration; prices and underselling; and trade publications. This last committee selected The Publishers' Weekly as the official organ of the trade and the medium for first announcements. Cf. also The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 12, 14.

²⁹The work of the convention was done largely in committees, the most important one being that on revision which was appointed to draw up a declaration of principles. Its report recommended the abolition of all discounts to persons outside the trade with the exception of the introduction and exchange of school books. Such transactions, however, were to be carried on by bona fide dealers or the publisher's traveling agent, and introduction prices were to be limited to thirty days. The wholesaling of live books to newspapers for premiums was denounced as a detriment to the trade. Trade sales were to be abolished. Pub-

achieved the committee on prices and underselling was directed to canvass the publishers to obtain their signatures to the main propositions of the platform "or their equivalent, seriatim, with discretion to obtain signatures to such modifications as may be found more acceptable" and to report the replies to the Union.³⁰

The convention had hardly adjourned, however, before there were complaints of violations of the agreements. They came from publisher and retailer alike, although the latter were much more numerous.³¹ Another source of grumbling came from the libraries which argued that they were unfairly excluded from the privilege of discount. Such organizations as the Mercantile Library in New York, which bought as many as five hundred copies of a single book, should be allowed a discount of at least 15 per cent.³²

In spite of all the shortcomings of the attempted reforms endorsements of the Cincinnati convention came from all parts of the country, and by the latter part of May over four hundred letters of approval had been received.³³ The executive committee encouraged by this response asked the booksellers in thirty leading cities to form local organizations and send accredited delegates to the convention at Put-in-Bay, Ohio, in July,³⁴ and Isaac C. Aston, president, toured the East to secure the co-operation of the publishers. Here, however, the program met with a cool reception. The publishers expressed an awareness of the evils and were in favor of the reforms advocated by the Union, but they would not go beyond this. Although the smaller houses were more or less willing to enter into agreements, the larger

lishers were to add an additional 10 per cent for postage to the retail price when selling by mail as compensation to the retailer who had to pay freight charges. And lastly, there should be a reduction of retail prices so that the largest trade discount could not exceed 33 1/3 per cent. The Publishers' Weekly, V (February 21, 1874), 183. Cf. also The American Bookseller, I (January 15, 1876), 50.

³⁰Ibid., II (July 1, 1876), 13.

³¹For sample complaints of both publishers and dealers, see The Publishers' Weekly, V (March 21, 28, April 4, May 2, June 13, 20, 1874), 290, 292, 335-36, 355, 356, 428, 558, 575.

³²Ibid., V (March 21, 1874), 292-93.

³³Ibid., V (May 9, 23, 1874), 454-55, 495.

³⁴Ibid., V (May 23, 1874), 495.

firms refused to commit themselves. Aston did succeed, however, in getting promises from the majority of Eastern publishers and jobbers to send representatives to Put-in-Bay.³⁵

The convention opened with great prospects. Over 120 representatives were present coming from most of the East, Middle West, and South.³⁶ Many of the publishers present were not members of the A.B.T.U., however, and hesitated to accept any position other than that of spectator for fear of being committed to all the points of the Cincinnati platform. Thus in order to get their whole-hearted co-operation the assembly was declared "a convention de novo of the trade at large" which bound no one to any previous action.³⁷

Again the main topic under discussion was that of discounts, but it was the discount to the ordinary buyer and not to the trade. The Committee of Thirty³⁸ reported that since the booksellers were "a most important element of civilization, second only to the church and schoolhouse" and no community could be "thoroughly prosperous" which did not contain at least one good bookstore it was necessary, therefore, to end the practice of selling to the public at prices which meant the ruination of the local dealer. Ministers, teachers, and libraries, however, in

³⁵Ibid., V (June 13, 27, 1874), 554-55, 587; VI (July 4, 1874), 10.

³⁶Ohio again had the largest representation with thirty-seven. New York was next with twenty. Pennsylvania had twelve. Eight were from Illinois and six from Indiana. Michigan and Massachusetts each had five, and Tennessee had four. There were two each from New Jersey, Iowa, and Minnesota; and Alabama, Missouri, Wisconsin, Kentucky, Connecticut, Nebraska, Louisiana, Maryland, and West Virginia each had one. There was also one present representing England and one from Germany. From the more populated states, the largest representation was from the urban centers which usually furnished half or over of their state's delegation. The number of representatives from some of the cities was: Boston, five; Philadelphia, nine; New York, fifteen; Cincinnati, six; Cleveland, six; Toledo, four; Chicago, four; St. Louis, one; New Orleans, one. Ibid., VI (August 8, 1874), "Supplement," pp. 1-2.

³⁷Ibid. VI (August 1, 1874), 140.

³⁸This body, representing all sections of the country, had been appointed upon the suggestion of William Lee, Boston publisher, as a committee "on the condition of the affairs of the trade." It was commonly called the Committee of Thirty, and most of the suggestions made by letter or in discussion on the floor were referred to it. Ibid., VI (August 8, 1874), "Supplement," p. 2.

view of the fact they were also engaged in the distribution of knowledge should be allowed a discount not exceeding 20 per cent.³⁹ The report was adopted unanimously, and a motion was passed to put this into effect except that the discount on medical books was set at 10 per cent.⁴⁰

On the matter of trade sales, the Committee of Thirty recommended that this method of wholesaling be abolished and in their place semi-annual book fairs under the auspices of the association be substituted.⁴¹ Two minor matters were also acted upon by the convention. First, on recommendation of the Committee of Thirty it was resolved to request publishers to distribute review copies through the local dealers, and second, it was resolved that it would be to the interest of all the trade to abolish the system of commercial travelers.⁴²

In addition to the 20 per cent rule and the abolition of the trade sales, the most important work of the convention was the formation of a new association. The constitution as adopted gave the name of the American Book Trade Association to the new organization. In addition to a president, three vice-presidents, a recording and a corresponding secretary, and a treasurer, it had four permanent committees whose members were elected annually by the association.⁴³

The mere existence of a national association did not, of course, eliminate the evils which plagued the trade. There was much work yet to be done. It was evident that if reform, espe-

³⁹The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 13-14. This was commonly known as the 20 per cent rule and its interpretation was to be the main bone of contention in the following years and conventions.

⁴⁰Ibid.; The Publishers' Weekly, VI (August 8, 1874), "Supplement," p. 3.

⁴¹The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 14. The trade sales, said the report, had been necessary because of the inability of the commercial travelers to meet all the wants of the trade, and it was hoped the book fairs would eliminate the evils induced by the trade sales and yet supplement the regular system of distribution.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 13-14; The Publishers' Weekly, VI (August 8, 1874), "Supplement," p. 3.

⁴³Ibid., VI (August 8, 1874), "Supplement," pp. 3, 4-5; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1874), 14. The committees were the same as those of the A.B.T.U.

cially the 20 per cent rule, was to be effective it was necessary that local associations be formed to enforce it, and by autumn of 1874 reports were received of such organizations in a number of cities.⁴⁴

The two most important of these organizations were the Western Booksellers' Association in the Middle West, and the Central Booksellers' Association in the East. After the adjournment of the Put-in-Bay convention a special meeting of the western book jobbers resolved to form a permanent organization, the Western Booksellers' Association, with headquarters at Chicago. Agreements were reached as to jobbing discounts, 25 and 30 per cent respectively being allowed according to the publisher although holiday books were not included in the list. Interest of 10 per cent a year was to be collected on all bills past due, and a discount of not more than 2 per cent was to be allowed for cash in ten days. Charges for boxes and drayage were extra and no freight was allowed the customer.⁴⁵ Later the association adopted a rule that books once sold could not be returned to the jobber except in the event of an error in filling the order. It was understood, however, that this would not prevent the jobber from buying back from his customers any good, clean stock at not less than 40 per cent discount and free delivery.⁴⁶

While the Western Booksellers' Association was primarily interested in standardizing the discounts of jobber to retailer, the Central Booksellers' Association centered its work around the observance of the 20 per cent rule. In September, 1874, a group of eastern publishers and jobbers met and formed the Central Booksellers' Association. The jobbers in New York, Philadelphia,

⁴⁴The Publishers' Weekly, VI (September 5, 12, 19, October 3, 17, November 14, 1874), 239, 240, 241, 283, 301, 365, 417, 541; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 15-16, 17. One such organization had been inaugurated at Nashville, Tennessee, before the first Cincinnati convention in 1873. Its purpose was to maintain the published retail prices especially on school books. It had also advocated a general convention of booksellers and promised to send an accredited delegate if one should be called. At the convention in January, 1874, it sent A. Setliff as its official delegate, his credentials being signed by eight Nashville booksellers. The Publishers' Weekly, IV (November 1, 1873), 484; V (March 14, 1874), 272.

⁴⁵Ibid., VI (August 8, 1874), "Supplement," p. 13.

⁴⁶Ibid., VI (September 5, 1874), 242.

Boston, and Baltimore were to observe a maximum discount and each publisher was to protect the scale insofar as his own books were concerned by requiring from all dealers receiving jobbers' rates an agreement not to undersell.⁴⁷ The by-laws required the executive committee to confer with each publisher and recommend to the association a maximum scale of discounts to be allowed by jobbers, and each publisher who was his own jobber was obliged to conform also. A schedule of maximum discounts for teachers, libraries, professional men, and large buyers outside the trade was also recommended by the committee. No extra copies or allowances for boxes, cartage or freight were to be given customers, but publishers were to grant a discount of at least 2 1/2 per cent better to members than to non members. The arbitration committee could levy fines for violations and direct the publishers to discipline the offender by withdrawing the special terms for one month for each offense. If the offender was not a member, wholesale rates were to be withdrawn for three months. Appeals could be made to the association and would be decided by a majority vote.⁴⁸

Once the central organization was underway attempts were made to bring the trade of New England and Philadelphia into the fold. In November, the New England booksellers were invited to co-operate with the A.B.T.A. and auxiliary associations.⁴⁹ A meeting was held and those present agreed to follow the 20 per cent rule and by-laws as adopted by the Central Booksellers' Association, but the rule was not to be binding on those who signed until proper notification was given as to the time it was to go into effect.⁵⁰ Although a strong desire was evinced for a formal organization and a committee was appointed to draft a constitution it was not until nearly a year later that the New England Booksellers' Association was actually organized.⁵¹

⁴⁷Ibid., VI (September 19, 1874), 301; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 16.

⁴⁸The Publishers' Weekly, VI (October 3, 1874), 359; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 16.

⁴⁹The Publishers' Weekly, VI (November 14, 1874), 553.

⁵⁰Ibid., VI (November 21, 1874), 380a; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 17.

⁵¹The Publishers' Weekly, VI (November 21, 1874), 380a, VIII (September 4, 1875), 406, 408; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 17, 23-24, 26.

In December the trade of Philadelphia was approached. About thirty men were present to hear the proposition of the Central Booksellers' Association. A lengthy discussion arose over whether the 20 per cent rule could be applied to any one or just those classes named. It was stated that there were no retail prices in Philadelphia and books were regularly sold over the counter at 20 and 25 per cent discount. If the rule was applicable to all classes of buyers the improvement would be small, but if only to the classes named this should be thoroughly understood. It was finally decided the rule allowed discounts only to those named, and all other customers outside the trade were held to the full retail price. The agreement was to go into effect on January 1, 1875, and about ten houses signed.⁵²

At the regular meeting of the Central Booksellers' Association in February, 1875, the committee whose duty it had been to get signatures to the 20 per cent rule reported all the leading houses of New York City had signed except the American News Company which sympathized with the movement but at the time it was impossible to take the necessary official action. Most of the important houses of Boston and New England had signified their approval, and the same was true for Philadelphia except in the case of J. B. Lippincott.⁵³ The association continued its work of strengthening the reform movement and preventing violations of the trade agreements. In March, 1875, it took another step forward by resolving that if charges were sustained by the arbitration committee the offender was to be reported to all members and they were forbidden to buy or sell to him at a discount better than 20 per cent until he agreed to abide by the rules.⁵⁴

⁵²The Publishers' Weekly, VI (December 5, 1874), 621; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 17-18.

⁵³The Publishers' Weekly, VII (February 16, 1875), 205a; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 18. This firm justified its refusal to sign by saying that while retailing below the published price was injurious to the trade, a sudden return to full price would be equally disadvantageous. It suggested that after January 1, 1875, the maximum discount to persons not in the trade be 10 per cent and apply only to new books published after that date. Gradual steps could then be taken to return to the full retail price, but if done too suddenly the public would be aroused.

⁵⁴The Publishers' Weekly, VII (March 6, 1875), 259.

Not only was the Central Booksellers' Association meeting with a fair degree of success, but there were other indications that reform was taking hold. The book dealers in Poughkeepsie, although not organized, enthusiastically endorsed the 20 per cent rule and agreed among themselves to adhere strictly to it.⁵⁵ The Western Booksellers' Association got off to a good start, and by the latter part of September a member of the executive committee reported it was "working like a charm."⁵⁶ The Publishers' Board of Trade, a school book publishers' association, fell in line by adopting at the request of the Central Booksellers' Association a by-law which was in principle the 20 per cent rule.⁵⁷ Some of the publishers also supported the movement by encouraging buying from the local jobbers and discouraging underselling. Howard Challen of Philadelphia announced that the retailer could purchase his new ten cent edition of the Arabian Nights, issued in parts, from the jobber as cheaply as from him except on orders of 250 or more which bore the retailer's imprint.⁵⁸ Boericke and Tafel, New York medical book (chiefly homeopathic) publishers, notified all their customers that undersellers would have their discount shortened until they pledged in writing to maintain the published price.⁵⁹

On the whole, the year 1874 closed with a general feeling of satisfaction. Business had been better than in the preceding year, and in New York the Christmas holiday trade had increased from 10 to 25 per cent more in quantity over that of 1873. The number of books published was less as the publishers had proceeded cautiously, but good books had sold remarkably well.⁶⁰

During the first half of the year 1875 there was a general observance throughout the West of the platform of the A.B.T.A.⁶¹ Chicago reported that the rates of discount had been generally

⁵⁵Ibid., VI (August 22, 1874), 189.

⁵⁶Ibid., VI (September 26, 1874), 335.

⁵⁷Ibid., VI (October 31, 1874), 482.

⁵⁸Ibid., VI (September 5, 1874), 252.

⁵⁹Ibid., VI (September 19, 1874), 307.

⁶⁰Ibid., VII (January 9, 1875), 27.

⁶¹Ibid., VII (February 6, 1875), 150.

preserved.⁶² In Cincinnati reform had been more or less carried out, and the same was true for St. Louis although this city asked for protection against violators who were not members of the A.B.T.A. Milwaukee dealers had fair success but some desire had been expressed to discontinue the local association.⁶³

In the East the situation was not quite so harmonious. All of the leading dealers with the exception of J. B. Lippincott and one or two "professional undersellers" of New York had signed the 20 per cent discount agreement, but it had been conditional on its being generally signed.⁶⁴ There was considerable misunderstanding, therefore, as to whether it was in force. In Boston and Philadelphia it was considered as not being in operation although a number of firms in the former city held to it. In New York City it was generally observed, and in Baltimore it was working profitably.⁶⁵

The convention for 1875 was called to meet at Niagara Falls on July 13, and special gatherings were planned for the law, medical, Catholic, and Sunday School publishers.⁶⁶ It was generally realized this was a critical meeting--the result of a year of attempted reform. The vital problem of "underselling and how

⁶²The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 19, 20; The Publishers' Weekly, VIII (July 24, 1875), 201-203. There were objections, of course, to the reform measures and complaints of violations. The Western Booksellers' Association was accused of being a "ring" to keep up prices and create a monopoly in western jobbing. (*Ibid.*, VI [August 29, 1874], 208.) The Chicago trade, too, was bothered by a type of underselling. An advertisement in the Post and Mail announced that "favorable arrangements" with eastern publishers allowed that paper to offer to its subscribers many books and periodicals at 20 per cent discount. While this did not go beyond a maximum of 20 per cent off, it allowed persons other than those specified in the rule the benefit of discount. *Ibid.*, VI (November 7, 1874), 518.

⁶³*Ibid.*, VIII (July 24, 1875), 201-203; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 20.

⁶⁴The Publishers' Weekly, VII (February 6, 1875), 150; VIII (July 24, 1875), 200. The total number of signatures to the agreement was 157, of which forty-nine were from Philadelphia, forty-seven in New York, and thirty-seven at Boston.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, VII (February 6, 1875), 150. Baltimore booksellers later reported that insistence upon the 20 per cent rule had lost them much of the teachers' and library trade. *Ibid.*, VIII (July 24, 1875), 201-203; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 20.

⁶⁶The Publishers' Weekly, VII (April 17, 1875), 415; VIII (Book Fair Supplement), 6.

to stop it" was still unsolved and its solution had to be the main work at Niagara.⁶⁷

At the convention the executive committee presented a series of resolutions which were referred to a committee of thirty before discussion.⁶⁸ This committee reported back four main resolutions which were taken up and voted on singly by the convention. The first resolution which restricted only members of the A.B.T.A. to participation in the book fairs was tabled without debate.⁶⁹ The second, which requested that publishers and dealers refuse to buy or sell, at better than 20 per cent discount, to any persons or firm which the board of arbitration declared had violated the trade agreements until the violator expressed a willingness to conform, brought forth so much debate that it was referred to a special committee of five for clarification. The resolution as reported back was much more vague, but it was unanimously carried without discussion.⁷⁰ Over the third resolution there was likewise much argument. This allowed the bookseller to dispose of shelf-worn and other unsalable books in January of each year as he saw fit provided such stock was separated and plainly marked. The questions involved in the debate were how much these sale books could be marked down and what constituted dead stock. In the end it was decided to allow each dealer to dispose of his unsalable works at his own discretion.⁷¹ The fourth resolution requesting the executive committee to petition Congress for the restoration of the former rates of postage on books and printed matter was adopted without much discussion.⁷²

⁶⁷ Ibid., VII (May 22, 1875), 541.

⁶⁸ The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 20.

⁶⁹ The Publishers' Weekly, VIII (July 24, 1875), 207.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 207-11, 215; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 21. As finally decided upon, the resolution read: "Resolved, That we, as an organization, do most respectfully and yet earnestly ask publishers so to control the sales of their publications to jobbers and other dealers, as to protect us in securing from the public the prices which they themselves have fixed on their own publications, and to prevent undersellers from purchasing at rates that will enable them to continue to sell in violation of the rules of this Association."

⁷¹ The Publishers' Weekly, VIII (July 24, 1875), 207, 216-20; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 21.

⁷² The Publishers' Weekly, VIII (July 24, 1875), 207, 220-21; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 20, 21.

The convention also attempted to restate the famous 20 per cent rule so as to make it clear that the maintenance of regular retail prices was the chief objective and the discount was the exception. This work was entrusted to a subcommittee of the Committee of Thirty and it was directed to present any other definitions it thought necessary to clarify other vague phrases, such as "large buyers."⁷³ The new resolution on the 20 per cent rule, however, still left much to be desired. It did state that members of the A.B.T.A. pledged themselves to sell at the publishers' advertised prices, but 10 per cent off on medical books and 20 per cent on all other classes was still allowed to public, circulating, and Sunday School libraries; to teachers, clergymen, and professional men buying for their own use; and to others named by the Publishers' Board of Trade.⁷⁴ In order to avoid any misunderstandings provision was made for exceptions. If the rules of the Association, "under exceptional circumstances," worked an injustice upon any dealer, the arbitration committee could authorize him to take measures to meet the emergency after notice had been given and "like liberty granted to the other dealers directly concerned."⁷⁵ On the whole, however, the rule was still ambiguous and was to cause further trouble in the years following.

The convention closed its work by delegating to the Central Booksellers' Association the duty of presenting and securing the signatures of the publishers to the revamped 20 per cent rule.⁷⁶ The responsibility given to the Central Booksellers' Association indicated the importance and reliance placed upon the local organizations. It was through them that systematic and practical reform would be achieved, and if their efforts could be co-ordinated it would be better to leave the special work of each community in their hands.⁷⁷

⁷³ The Publishers' Weekly, VIII (July 24, 1875), 221.

⁷⁴ The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 23. The publishers' Board of Trade allowed the discount also to school boards buying supplies from public funds and to schools supported by religious denominations and purchasing their own books.

⁷⁵ Ibid. The rule was to go into effect August 1, 1875.

⁷⁶ The Publishers' Weekly, VIII (July 24, 1875), 226; The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 22.

⁷⁷ The Publishers' Weekly, VIII (August 21, 1875), 368-69.

The year following the convention was a fruitful one insofar as the increase of local organizations was concerned. The booksellers of western and central New York formed the Booksellers' and Stationers' Association of New York in August, 1875 and adopted an ambitious program.⁷⁸ Other localities, such as Lancaster, Pennsylvania; Washington, D. C.; Michigan; the Hudson River communities including Albany, Troy, Cohoes, Lansingburgh, and Schenectady; and the dealers in the Lehigh Valley, all had organizations by the time of the Philadelphia convention in July, 1876.⁷⁹ The movement even spread to Canada, and a Canadian booksellers' association was established in March, 1876.⁸⁰ Altogether, by July of that year, there were seventeen local organizations recognized by the American Book Trade Association.⁸¹

On the whole, there were good indications at the close of the year that reform was well on its way. The Christmas holidays had been profitable, and in most cases business was up to and in some surpassed that of 1874. This was attributed to the success of the reform measures, and although general publishing had not been as brisk as heretofore the "salient books" had sold well. The booksellers, too, had bought carefully, mostly for immediate needs, and so with smaller stocks on hand they were freer to buy the new books as issued.⁸² Retail prices had prevailed for the

⁷⁸The American Bookseller, II (July 1, September 1, 1876), 23, 166.

⁷⁹Ibid., II (July 1, August 1, 1876), 24, 25, 26, 117; The Publishers' Weekly, VIII (September 18, 1875), 463; X (July 15, 1876), 147.

⁸⁰The American Bookseller, I (March 15, 1876), 203.

⁸¹The Publishers' Weekly, X (July 1, 1876), 9-10. They were: Booksellers' Association for the Dominion of Canada; New England Booksellers' Association; Central Booksellers Association; Western Booksellers' Association; Booksellers' and Stationers' Association of New York; Michigan Booksellers' Association; Hudson River Booksellers' Association; Providence (R.I.) Booksellers' Association; Buffalo Booksellers' Association; Rochester (N. Y.) Booksellers' Association; Book Trade Association of Philadelphia; Washington (D.C.) Booksellers' Association; Baltimore Booksellers' Association; New Orleans Booksellers' Association; Columbus (Ohio) Booksellers' Association; Milwaukee Booksellers' Association; and St. Louis Booksellers' Association.

⁸²Ibid., IX (January 8, 1876), 35; The American Bookseller, I (January 1, 1876), 5.

most part, and underselling, both among retailers and publishers had lost some of its prominence.⁸³

All was not gold that glittered, however, and the editor of The American Bookseller pointed out there were "certain natural laws of trade" the operation of which could not be changed by legislation. Any commodity, such as books, which was designed for general use and "scattered broadcast all over the country" could no more be kept out of the hands of particular dealers than the rain drops that fell into the Hudson River could be kept from flowing into the ocean. A publisher had little or no control over his books once they were out of his hands, and though it was to his interest not to have his product cheapened he could not protect himself by arbitrary methods. The bonding of all dealers was the only assurance that the price would be kept, but no bookseller would agree to such a procedure unless the publisher promised to take back all unsold copies. So in spite of the apparent progress of reform there were still flagrant violations of the 20 per cent rule.⁸⁴

The convention of 1876 was called to meet at Philadelphia in order that those attending could take advantage of the centennial,⁸⁵ but as the time for the convention of 1876 drew closer, there was less and less assurance that reform was or could be accomplished. Although there had been a general stagnation of business during the past year, the dullness of the book trade was

⁸³Ibid., pp. 5, 11.

⁸⁴Ibid., I (January 15, 1876), 50. See letter from A. J. Goodenough, secretary of the Providence (Rhode Island) Booksellers' Association in The Publishers' Weekly, IX (January 22, 1876), 84, for the failure of local organizations to enforce the 20 per cent ruling. One of the largest of the violators was the American News Company, and in February, 1876, the Central Booksellers' Association appointed a committee to memorialize this jobbing house "setting forth the evils that burden the trade from the sale of current books to the bazaars and fancy goods dealers at rates which foster the system of underselling." The memorial, signed by the rest of the trade, was to be sent to the American News Company, but apparently this firm took no notice of it. (Ibid., IX [February 26, 1876], 255; The American Bookseller, I [February 15, 1876], 133.) The ambiguity of the term "large buyer" also continued to plague the trade and resulted in much selling below the advertised price. In fact, half the business of many dealers was made up of professional and large buyers. The Publishers' Weekly, IX (January 1, 1876), 11; The American Bookseller, I (January 15, 1876), 50.

⁸⁵Ibid., I (June 1, 1876), 361.

attributed by many to the attempted reforms.⁸⁶

It was not a bright picture of success that greeted the delegates. The executive committee reported that the book trade had gone from bad to worse until it was impossible to tell whether to hope for better things.⁸⁷ The local associations from which much had been expected gave discouraging reports. Baltimore and Cincinnati reported only a fair working of the 20 per cent rule.⁸⁸ The Central Booksellers' Association stated that its detailed work had been confined to New York, but even here the past year had been more or less "one of quiet contemplation," the association resting "upon the laurels" won before the Niagara convention.⁸⁹ This apathy was widespread, however, and it was as "though some power hostile to the book trade had woven a subtle spell, and cast it over the whole" of the brotherhood.⁹⁰ Lack of interest was also noticeable in the Northeast. The New England Booksellers' Association with a membership of seventy-two had only fifteen present at its meeting in June.⁹¹ Philadelphia announced that the 20 per cent rule had shortened profits and turned customers to the New York "book butchers." Fear of lawsuits had prevented the asking of jobbers, publishers, and others not to supply the undersellers.⁹²

The Arbitration Committee of the A.B.T.A. reported that since the Niagara convention it had reviewed a large number of cases in relation to the 20 per cent rule. They were, for the most part, trivial and were referred to the local associations for settlement. The majority and those most bitter in denunciation strangely enough had been presented by non-members.⁹³

⁸⁶Ibid., I (April 15, 1876), 269.

⁸⁷Ibid., II (July 15, 1876), 59.

⁸⁸The Publishers' Weekly, X (July 22, 1876), 182-83.

⁸⁹The American Bookseller, II (July 15, 1876), 62-63; The Publishers' Weekly, X (July 22, 1876), 178-79.

⁹⁰The American Bookseller, II (July 15, 1876), 62-63; The Publishers' Weekly, X (July 22, 1876), 178-79.

⁹¹Ibid., X (July 8, 1876), 133.

⁹²Ibid., X (July 22, 1876), 181-82; The American Bookseller, II (July 15, 1876), 64-65.

⁹³The Publishers' Weekly, X (July 22, 1876), 173; The American Bookseller, II (July 15, 1876), 57.

The Committee on Book Fairs did not have an encouraging report either. Three fairs had been held, but only one had been successful. The scheme was still in the experimental stage, however, and since the fairs had been conducted under adverse business conditions, it was recommended they be tried for one more year.⁹⁴

The 20 per cent rule which had received so much attention in previous years was a neglected subject at Philadelphia. Since it had not worked out so well the convention felt it was inadvisable at the time to try "to improve upon it, either by shortening the discount, or still further limiting the privileged classes."⁹⁵ So far as legislation was concerned, therefore, the trade was just where it was at Niagara.

To the trade as a whole, the results at Philadelphia were disappointing. Little new business was accomplished, and most matters were indefinitely postponed or pigeon-holed by referring them to standing committees.⁹⁶ The heat was partly responsible for this, but much of the apathy was due to poor representation. The convention had been one of eastern jobbers and publishers with a few retailers from that section. The West was poorly represented, and retailers as a class took very little part. The work had been left to the publishers and jobbers, but retail co-operation was a much needed element in securing reform.⁹⁷

Above all a closer knit organization was the crying need of the American Book Trade Association, and lack of it had been largely responsible for its failure.⁹⁸ At the time of the Philadelphia convention it had a membership only of about two hundred houses, but two months later the treasurer reported that not a single member had paid dues for the next year.⁹⁹ The signs all pointed to the association's early demise.

⁹⁴The Publishers' Weekly, X (July 22, 1876), 174.

⁹⁵The American Bookseller, II (July 15, 1876), 51.

⁹⁶The Publishers' Weekly, X (July 15, September 16, 1876), 150, 456; The American Bookseller, II (August 15, 1876), 141.

⁹⁷The Publishers' Weekly, X (July 15, 1876), 150; The American Bookseller, II (August 15, 1876), 141-42.

⁹⁸The Publishers' Weekly, X (August 19, 1876), 344.

⁹⁹Ibid., X (August 19, September 9, 1876), 344, 421.

The straitened financial condition of most dealers and dull business did much to dampen the ardor for reform.¹⁰⁰ More and more the 20 per cent rule was broken and discounts greater than the maximum were allowed. The Chicago trade took a step in this direction in the fall of 1876 by extending the discount to libraries to 30 per cent, but it maintained the regular 20 per cent in other cases. It claimed this action was necessary because outside firms offered better than 20 per cent to these institutions.¹⁰¹

By the end of the year the A.B.T.A. was dead, and the reform measures advocated by it had become but the dry bones of a skeleton which rattled now and then in the years to come. At the annual dinner of the Stationers' Board of Trade in November, 1878, A. D. F. Randolph, former president of the association, said he represented a "homeless class, the waifs and strays" who had "no guild, no table of their own." Once upon a time, however, the men who made and sold books had "swept Lake Erie, and found a harbor in Put-in-Bay, stood unabashed in the presence of the rapids at Niagara, but was subsequently and suddenly cut off by sunstroke in the Judges' Hall of the Exposition, in the Centennial Year." There had been no public funeral but only a private interment in some place nobody knew. The history of the A.B.T.A., he said, was summed up in the Mother Goose rhyme of Solomon Grundy.¹⁰²

The death of the American Book Trade Association and its program of organized reform left no ill effects upon the trade. Within a year after the Philadelphia convention the 20 per cent rule insofar as it applied to libraries was dead and those who tried to maintain it found their trade going elsewhere.¹⁰³ Reform was nowhere, said the editor of The Publishers' Weekly in Septem-

¹⁰⁰Ibid., X (September 16, 1876), 456. The hard times had paralyzed "the conscience of the average bookseller" and dimmed "his sense of obligation under the provisions of the reform compact." The American Bookseller, II (July 1, 1876), 7.

¹⁰¹The Publishers' Weekly, X (October 28, 1876), 701.

¹⁰²Ibid., XIV (November 16, 1878), 594.

¹⁰³Ibid., XII (August 21, 1877), 191. At the annual meeting of the American Library Association in September, 1877, William F. Poole of the Chicago Public Library reported that "the 20 per cent men had disappeared." A Chicago publisher, in competition, had given him a discount of 38 per cent and he bought regularly at 37 per cent off. Although the publishers found little or no

ber, 1877, and most of the publishers and retailers had "evidently made up their minds to accommodate themselves to the difficulties of hard times by looking after present policy rather than permanent results."¹⁰⁴

Little actual reform could be expected, however, without organized action, and there were cries coming out of the wilderness for some sort of national organization which would be able to guide and enforce the much needed reforms.¹⁰⁵ No one, however, advocated the resurrection of the ill-fated American Book Trade Association. The Publishers' Weekly warned against any society of booksellers which did not have "strength and unity of purpose." What was needed was not "organized revolt" but "organized action" and without the latter nothing could be accomplished.¹⁰⁶

The years following the Philadelphia convention were not entirely fruitless, but the associations formed were local or regional in scope. An attempt was made in Missouri in 1879 to call a state-wide convention to consider ways and means of reform, but nothing resulted from it.¹⁰⁷ In 1881, the booksellers and stationers of the Northwest were requested by certain interested individuals to meet in Chicago in June to consider the general condition of the trade and to take what action seemed "advisable for the interest of all concerned."¹⁰⁸

Sixty-six persons were present when the convention was called to order, and although Chicago dealers had not been among the signers, representatives from that city were in the majority,

profit in selling at these rates, he said, they had the advantage of having their publications in a public library. Ibid., XII (September 8, 1877), 258.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 247.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., XXIX (January 9, 16, March 27, 1886), 47, 76, 413; The Literary Light, IX (June, 1894), 83.

¹⁰⁶The Publishers' Weekly, XXIII (March 10, 1883), 291.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., XVI (December 6, 1879), 804.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., XIX (April 30, 1881), 484; The American Bookseller, XI (May 2, 1881), 266. The signers of the call were from Aurora, Illinois; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Leavenworth, Kansas; Denver, Colorado; Elgin, Illinois; Knoxville, Iowa; Marshall, Michigan; Winona, Minnesota; Jacksonville, Illinois; Janesville, Wisconsin; Dubuque, Iowa, and Bloomington, Illinois.

forming nearly one-half the number.¹⁰⁹ An organization known as "The Northwestern Booksellers' and Stationers' Association" was effected, and discussion of the price and discount evils occupied the rest of the time. As usual the responsibility for correcting the abuses was put entirely on the publishers. Nothing constructive was accomplished except that a committee was appointed to secure the co-operation of the trade in the various states and territories, and July, 1882, was set as the time for the next gathering.¹¹⁰

This effort to bring together the booksellers of a locality was but short-lived. The association did practically nothing during the following year, and the 1882 convention sounded its death-knell. At this assembly the feeling was generally expressed that it was impossible for booksellers to form a combination which could force reform upon the publishers.¹¹¹

Toward the end of the decade more successful attempts at local organization were made particularly in the South. These were brought about largely through the need of controlling the school books. In February, 1888, the dealers of North Carolina met at Raleigh and formed the North Carolina Booksellers' and Stationers' Board of Trade. Resolutions were adopted which condemned the public circulation of wholesale list prices for educational works, the printing of retail prices on text books, and direct sales from the publisher to the consumer. The question of subscription books was also brought up, and recommendations were made to patronize only those publishers who allowed the retailers a discount of 15 per cent for handling and delivering such publications.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., XI (June 15, 1881), 350. There were thirty-nine from Illinois, twenty-seven of which were from Chicago. Michigan, Missouri, and Indiana were each represented by four. Seven came from Iowa. Minnesota and Wisconsin had two each, and Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Pennsylvania had one apiece.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 350-51.

¹¹¹ The Publishers' Weekly, XXII (July 29, 1882), 141. The lack of interest shown by the members of the association may have been due in part to the fact that the last half of 1881 had been one of the most prosperous periods for several years past and the need for reform was not very pressing. Ibid., XXI (January 28, 1882), 77.

¹¹² The American Bookseller, XXIII (March 1, 1888), 152.

Two years later, the Virginia Booksellers' Association was born. It was, perhaps, the most successful of all the local societies. Within four years after its birth, this association reached an agreement with the state school board which recognized the retailers as the "medium of supply," and set a uniform scale of discounts to be allowed the board in its purchases.¹¹³

In the Northwest another organization, the Northwestern Booksellers' and Newsdealers' Association, sponsored largely by the trade of Minnesota, was started in 1891. The governing body was a president and a board of directors, the members of the latter being selected to represent the various states of the Northwest.¹¹⁴

The work of holding the association together, however, fell upon the Minneapolis dealers who during the following year held several meetings to discuss trade problems in relation to their organization. At the first annual convention held in Minneapolis in July, 1892, only about half the members were present but forty new ones were admitted. Prominent in the discussion were the questions of free text books and the relationship between the publishers, the retailers, and "illegitimate competitors." The most important matter which came up was whether the society should affiliate with the National Newsdealers' and Booksellers' Association which was primarily concerned with stopping the cut-rates on periodicals, and two delegates were chosen to attend the national convention at Philadelphia in October.¹¹⁵

Although the Northwestern Booksellers' and Newsdealers' Association was, perhaps, the most successful of the northern organizations it was in a sense too limited to accomplish much beyond keeping alive agitation for reform. In the first place its headquarters was Minneapolis and thus it drew more from that immediate locality than from the Northwest as a whole. Chicago was, no doubt, the center, and no organization in that territory could hope to be successful without the support of that city. A second weakness was the emphasis placed on the periodical trade to the exclusion of books, the latter becoming a secondary consideration.

¹¹³The Publishers' Weekly, XLVI (July 28, 1894), 146-47.

¹¹⁴The Literary Light, IX (June, 1894), 85.

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 85-88.

The depression which resulted from the Panic of 1893 brought again insistent demands for reform, although by fall of the following year there was some optimism exhibited as to a return to better times.¹¹⁶ The chief complaint at this time was underselling and particularly on the part of the bazaars. Book-buying syndicates were suggested as a means to give regular dealers the advantages of quantity purchases and allow them to compete with the department stores. The schemes for syndicate buying were not brought to fruition, however, except in a few of the eastern cities such as New York, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and Providence, where the local branches of the National Newsdealers' and Booksellers' Association acted as news companies, but again it was periodical literature which benefitted the most.¹¹⁷

The best plan offered to lead the trade out of the desert continued to be organization. Because of their strong association the Virginia booksellers were in 1894 in better condition than those elsewhere, and at their fourth annual convention they resolved that the executive committee "be instructed to issue a circular letter inviting all publishers and booksellers in other States to become auxiliary members 'of that association' until such time as they shall form State associations of their own."¹¹⁸

In the meantime, it was suggested that the retailers organize locally or regionally, study the problems which faced them, and after condensing their grievances into "intelligible form," send delegates to a general meeting where a national association would be instituted to deal directly with the publishers. It was pointed out, however, that in such an organization, the retailer had to be willing "to undertake responsibilities as well as to reap benefits."¹¹⁹

In spite of the lack of success in getting a national association which could bring about the much needed reform, agitation for the correction of evils was kept up mainly through the columns of The Publishers' Weekly. Business conditions were still bad, and, during the two years 1894 to 1896, there were 129 book-

¹¹⁶The Publishers' Weekly, XLVI (September 29, 1894), 372.

¹¹⁷Ibid., XLVI (August 25, October 6, 1894), 257, 542; The Literary Light, IX (June, 1894), 88.

¹¹⁸The Publishers' Weekly, XLVI (July 28, 1894), 147-48.

¹¹⁹The Literary Light, IX (June, 1894), 83.

store failures with losses of over \$1,000,000.¹²⁰ What reform was achieved was due, as before, largely to individual initiative. A publisher now and then reduced prices,¹²¹ and sometimes in desperation booksellers of a certain locality united to beat the department stores at their own game of underselling,¹²² but on the whole the century closed without much accomplished. Almost a whole generation had passed since organized reform had been first instituted, and it is little wonder that the trade looked with gloomy forebodings at the future.

In the middle of 1900 a number of men interested in reforming the trade evils met a group of New York publishers to discuss remedies, and the result was the American Publishers' Association.¹²³ The following year, it presented a plan of reform which met the major demands of the retailers. Each copyrighted book would have a definite price and no discount would be allowed outside the trade except to libraries. The normal trade discount was to be small, the suggested one being 25 per cent, and the publishers promised to do their part to maintain prices by refusing to supply undersellers. It was also recommended that a general reduction in prices be made.¹²⁴

Following the formation of the publishers' association the retailers united to deal with their own special problems and to co-operate with the publishers. Their efforts culminated in the American Booksellers' Association whose organization was completed in March, 1901.¹²⁵ At its head was an advisory board composed of fifty members, with at least one from each state, which had charge of all the interests of the association. It could make suggestions to, or veto measures proposed by the executive

¹²⁰The Publishers' Weekly, XLIX (April 25, 1896), 726.

¹²¹For instance, P. Blackiston and Son, Philadelphia, reduced the prices of their medical books and abolished all discounts except to the trade. Ibid., XLVIII (July 20, 1895), 116-17.

¹²²For example, the retailers of Boston combined in 1896 to buy the book bargains from the bazaars and resell them. Ibid., XLIX (May 9, 1896), 298.

¹²³Ibid., LIX (February 9, 1901), 487.

¹²⁴Ibid., LIX (February 16, 1901), 524-26.

¹²⁵Ibid., LIX (February 9, March 30, 1901), 487, 897. By February over six hundred retailers had joined.

committee whose duty was to devise plans for reform. Provision was also made for local organizations as an integral part of the whole. Five or more of these societies would compose a state association which in turn could name a member of the powerful advisory board.¹²⁶

This new type of horizontal rather than vertical organization promised much in the beginning and gave a new lease on life to the trade. In many ways conditions were improved, but it still could not be said that the book trade had fully recovered from its past illnesses. The old sores were not entirely healed, and an absolute cure was yet to be discovered.¹²⁷

¹²⁶Ibid., LIX (March 30, 1901), 490-94. The vague relationship of the local associations to the old A.B.T.A. had been one of the weaknesses of that organization.

¹²⁷As late as 1931 the National Association of Book Publishers made a thorough survey of the book business in order to discover what ailed it. The findings showed that very little progress had been made among the booksellers themselves and the recommendations made would have sounded familiar to those who had met at Cincinnati, Put-in-Bay, Niagara Falls, and Philadelphia a half century before. See O. H. Cheney, Economic Survey of the Book Industry, 1930-1931 (New York, 1931).

